

Kevin Deely, Candidate for NEA Executive Committee

In what areas and on what issues can NEA expand its energies to better address the concerns of higher education members and how might that be done?

Having started my career in higher education, I can very much appreciate the myriad concerns our higher education members face as part of an organization that primarily focuses its energies on the K-12 environment.

Indeed, as a Labor organization the NEA must expand in order to survive for posterity, and in what better area can that expansion occur than in the higher education space? Rather than being a secondary consideration, the NEA should increase its organizational might to primarily target the needs of all those who work in post-secondary institutions. Adjunct faculty, higher education staff, and higher ed support staff have needs for the advocacy that the NEA can provide. The relationship between the NEA and the higher education community is a natural one, and higher educators from all over the nation are clamoring for representation and organization. I have seen this take place in Pennsylvania where in the last few years PSEA has organized several community colleges and has partnered with graduate students and others at state run universities to organize. NEA should advocate at the federal level for additional funding for higher educator and full-time tenure positions. Investing in more full-time positions at institutions of higher education makes sense for the stability and growth of membership in higher education.

The NEA as a business needs to invest in growth. At present the organization spends less than 1.5% of its budget on organizing. In a climate that is increasingly pro-union, workers are asking for leaders with expertise in organizing to form new locals. I would support increasing the organizing budget to at least 5%, and work towards tripling our higher ed membership in the next six years. Although the NEA currently focuses on a service model, a shift towards organizing will allow for a stronger and more robust organization without diminishing the services that our members have grown to expect.

The NEA had been a leader in publishing a journal of higher education research. After Janus, and the budgetary cuts that followed, it was placed on the chopping block. I think that the NEA needs to establish itself as a professional labor organization that is also an academic leader and a think tank of sorts.